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Gerth, Matthias A ; Siegert, Gabriele

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Abstract

Journalists have the power to enhance the visibility of certain aspects of campaign issues and, thus, are relevant mediators between political actors and citizens. To serve the public interest, news media coverage should include the views of different political camps and should enable citizens to build opinions in an enlightened way. The authors analyze journalists' framing of the coverage of a 2008 campaign on the naturalization of immigrants. Content analysis was conducted of all campaign coverage by TV stations and major newspaper outlets over a period of 14 weeks. To identify dominant frames, the authors coded all campaign arguments made in news media coverage ($N = 3,570$). The results show that media coverage focused on three substantive frames—rule of law, mass naturalization, and people's final say. The findings reveal that coverage was not balanced but was clearly in favor of the rule of law frame. This framing bias applies to different types of media, including public service TV and elite newspapers. Furthermore, the authors found a striking bias toward institutional actors, who were covered much more often than civil society actors.

Keywords

frame selection, framing, media bias

Traditional mass media still play an important role as mediators between citizens and political actors. The news media “mediate between the citizenry . . . and the institutions involved in government, electoral processes, or, more generally, opinion

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formation" (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 230). Modern news media serve as the main source of information for citizens. And already "some minimal level of information facilitates the exercise of citizenship" (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008, p. 717). Political news coverage is "the currency on which democracy operates" (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1994, p. 35). To make enlightened voting choices, citizens must have access to political information, and it is important to note that the ways in which the media cover politics affect voters (Druckman & Parkin, 2005). News media outlets "highlight certain issues, frame events in particular ways, and portray candidates in varying lights" (Druckman & Parkin, 2005, p. 1030). Hence, from the normative perspective of traditional journalism and in keeping with the notion of social responsibility (McQuail, 2008), the media are expected to transparently cover politics and to offer places to all different kinds of positions, to implement neutrality, objectivity, independence, and unbiased framing in their coverage. However, "recent theoretical work in economics shows that under competition and diversity of opinion, newspapers will provide content that is more biased" (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008).

Commercialization and mediatization challenge the traditional functions of news and journalism in democracy. News media as—in most cases—privately owned entities have to be substantially financed to produce quality news. Today, financial data have at least the same importance as journalistic norms in the daily lives of editors and journalists. The tensions between commercial and journalistic goals have become very strict. This is especially true in the case of political news coverage. Traditionally, journalists' decisions are driven by editorial and corporate norms, principles, and routines. Journalistic norms such as diversity, objectivity, and truth are still ideal objectives for many journalists, if not always possible to achieve. But today, another force must be considered: market pressure. Most media companies have to survive in a dynamic market environment with changing technological, social, and political preconditions and increasing competition for the attention of media consumers. Now, market-driven media are not necessarily expected to invest in commenting or in extensive factual reporting on direct democratic campaigns. Moreover, to save money, market-driven media can be expected to heavily rely on news agencies as sources of coverage, instead of investigations by their own journalists. The story is different for public service media. Unbiased, neutral, and resource-intensive coverage is one reason for their pure existence.

Media companies need to sell their content to their audiences, and—in the case of private companies, more importantly—to advertisers. They use their brands to signal quality and competence (Siebert, Gerth, & Rademacher, 2011). New, competing channels, such as the Internet, mobile communications, and free newspapers, have permanently changed this environment in the past 25 years. Professional journalistic entities have reacted by installing professional management competences in and around their newsrooms.

Political actors aim to influence the judgment and voting decisions of citizens, but most have very limited resources (e.g., financial resources) to contact their target audiences via their own organizational channels (e.g., party newsletters) or paid media (e.g., political advertising). Thus, getting access to journalists and the editorial content

of the mass media is crucial for political parties and organizations as well as for individual politicians and their staffs. However, getting access and being considered a source for media coverage is only the first step in this process. Political actors want to get not only their general message across but also their framing of this message (see Hänggli & Kriesi, 2012). Public relations (PR) offer the means to communicate and influence journalists' decisions. With successful PR work, political actors get access to editorial content in the media that they do not have to pay for (earned media; Schnur, 1999, p. 146), as they do for political advertising. In some cases, this also has the advantage of enabling political actors to "transfer" the credibility of certain media outlets to their own messages (Baker, 2002, p. 12; McManus, 1995, p. 322). The success of this strategy depends heavily on the way the media treat political PR messages and on the degree of PR professionalization in political organizations. It depends on the strength of "networks of professional communicators" (Entman, Matthes, & Pellicano, 2009, p. 176) who are able to select aspects of a topic and construct messages that find their way into the media. If journalists interpret these messages in the ways intended by their sources, strategic communication has been successful.

Political PR has become professionalized during the past few decades, as a result of the decline of the traditional party press. At the same time, the media have developed their own logic of reporting politics. Altheide and Snow (1979), therefore, have introduced the notion of "media logic." The transition from the traditional media-politics relation to a new quality of relationship further developed in the 1980s (Mazzoleni, 1987). "The party logic no longer favours one party or ideology, but is instead guided by balance, fairness and a sacerdotal approach toward political actors" (van Aelst, Maddens, Noppe, & Fiers, 2008, p. 196).

Thus, the presentation of political actors as well as the framing choices of journalists are also guided by journalistic criteria—and not only by party-specific ones. Recent results in communication research have revealed that political actors are not the dominant force in the framing of political messages. "The fact that both journalists and politicians agree that the journalists have the ultimate power over the framing of the news is rather striking, especially in light of the discussion about the professionalization of political campaigning, spin-doctors and news management" (Strömbäck & Nord, 2006). Now, based on this development, we could expect the news media to cover politics using their own media logic—at least to some extent, depending on the type of media outlet (e.g., factual in elite media, personalized in tabloid media, and regionalized in regional media)—and to make their own framing choices. However, the question remains of whether this holds true for structured types of political communication, such as direct democratic campaigns and, if so, to what extent. Furthermore, as has been shown in previous research, countries with long traditions of direct democracy have institutionalized their processes of direct democracy (Gerth, Rademacher, Pühringer, Dahinden, & Siegert, 2009). This is true not only for political institutions but also for journalism and journalistic behavior. In this context, the general framework for campaign coverage is set, and journalists develop a routine business for conducting campaign coverage.

In this interaction of journalists and political actors, institutional actors have an advantage. Following many authors in the field, we can expect high-level government representatives to be the main sources for political news coverage (Bennett, 1990; Gans, 1979; Tresch, 2009). They have “a bonus in the distribution of media attention” (van Aelst et al., 2008). This also applies to Switzerland, where, as stated by Tresch (2009, p. 85), the “media mostly . . . reproduce existing hierarchies and structures of influence.” This reflects the media logic of selecting sources. It also refers to what Bennett (1990) has called “indexing,” which is nothing but “a weighting system for what gets into the news” (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007, p. 49). Thus, the consequence of the lower prominence of representatives of the political elite is lower visibility in the media (de Vreese & Semetko, 2004). We, therefore, expect members of the government to be covered more prominently than other types of political actors.

In this article, we offer descriptive insights into how the news media cover direct democratic campaigns. We analyzed media content and shed light on the framing of the campaign on the naturalization of immigrants. Our aim was to compare the framing presented by different types of media outlets and at different points in time during 14 weeks of campaigning. Furthermore, we analyzed different types of political actors and their appearances in the media. Media bias theory predicts that we should find bias in the coverage of the two opposing camps. However, Tresch (2009, p. 80), for example, has found that the direction of bias in the media varies—“there is hardly any evidence that media decisions are biased toward parliamentarians of a particular partisan color”—and so the media are not always favoring the same political camp. In the first part of this article, we present some thoughts on the role of journalists and the mass media in framing political campaigns. We then develop four hypotheses and present our methodological approach. We then move on, in the second section, to present a general depiction of the campaign and our sample of media outlets, before analyzing the frames presented by journalists and political actors who appeared in campaign coverage in the third and final section.

The Media and Framing of Political Messages

Changes in the media and political communication environment have, obviously, consequences for the traditional logic of journalistic norms and routines and, thus, for media content. The process of news production and selection has become commercialized (McManus, 2009), political communication has become professionalized (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999), and content has become mediatized (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Lundby, 2009). Not only story and source selection but also the framing choices of journalists are potentially highly influenced by these processes. By their own contributions to the framing of political messages—and, in our case, direct democratic campaigns—journalists make certain aspects more salient and present them in particular styles and contexts. The important question is how they do this.

Following other contributors to this issue (Hänggli, 2012; Hänggli & Kriesi, 2012; Matthes, 2012; Schemer, Wirth, & Matthes, 2012; Wettstein, 2012), we use the definition of framing offered by Entman (1993):

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment and recommendation for the item described. (p. 52)

This definition is more precise than understanding frames as only “central organizing ideas that provide coherence to a designated set of idea elements” (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002, p. 105; for this argument, see Matthes, 2009; Matthes & Kohring, 2008). Frames “invoke the same objects and traits, using identical or synonymous words and symbols in a series of similar communications that are concentrated in time” (Entman et al., 2009, p. 177). A direct democratic campaign offers the perfect communication situation, as it is “concentrated in time”—in our case 14 weeks—and serves as a “series of similar communication.” In accordance with the general research focus on this issue, we use substantive frames as the leading concept (Entman, 2004). Our frames are issue specific (de Vreese, 2005; Matthes, 2009), and they are specific to the direct democratic campaign we analyzed. In addition to the three issue-specific, substantive frames that we identified for our direct democratic campaign (Hänggli, 2012), we found a certain amount of contest frames in the news coverage. This type of frame normally appears without any issue-specific content. It is about contests between political actors, personal attacks, horse-race coverage (Iyengar, Norpoth, & Hahn, 2004), personalization, and so forth.

Based on the theoretical framework presented above, our aim is to answer the following research questions: How do different types of media outlets cover direct democratic campaigns? What kinds of actors do they cite? and What kinds of frames are they using? With the hypotheses presented below, we focus on the intensity of coverage, the bias of political actors, and bias in the framing of the coverage:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Market-driven media, such as tabloids and free newspapers, invest considerably less in the coverage of political campaigns and rely considerably more on journalistic routines than other media, such as elite and regional newspapers as well as public service TV.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The framing of market-driven media, such as tabloids and free newspapers, is considerably more biased than the framing of other media, such as elite and regional newspapers, as well as public service TV.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): The fewer resources the media put into the coverage of direct democratic campaigns, the smaller the diversity of coverage and thus the greater the bias toward one side of the campaign.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Government and parliamentary representatives are covered more prominently than individuals or organizations representing civil society.

Method

Context

The context of our study was a popular initiative voted on in June 2008 in Switzerland. The initiative was launched by the populist right party. Citizens were asked if they wanted to accept strict rules on the naturalization of immigrants. Basically, the question was whether Swiss citizens themselves should decide on naturalizations in open assemblies or whether semiprofessional committees should decide on naturalizations. Another controversial issue was whether immigrants should have the right to bring assemblies' or committees' decisions to court.

In this initiative, we identified three substantive frames, used by the pro and contra sides. These frames were operationalized by the campaign arguments offered by the pro and contra camps in the campaign. The "rule of law" frame, mainly used by opponents of the initiative, addressed the fairness of naturalization procedures that some argued should be oriented toward protecting basic human rights and adhering to constitutional rules. According to proponents of this frame, immigrants should be able to go to court when they do not feel fairly treated while going through the process of naturalization. For the pro side, naturalizations were political, rather than administrative or legalistic, acts. Thus, the pro side focused on the "people's final say" frame. This line of argument rested on the notion that the people should have the right to make final decisions about naturalizations, without the aid of any legal instrument. According to advocates of the "people's final say" position, the possibility of going to court should not exist. In addition to those in the "people's final say" and "rule of law" camps, there were some who addressed rather xenophobic fears. They told voters that "mass naturalizations" had to be avoided and that this would not be possible until the initiative was adopted. Thus, for our analysis, the third frame we identified was the "mass naturalization" frame.

The frames we identified were used by different kinds of political actors. Switzerland is a highly fragmented, multiparty system that is divided into three different poles: the left (dominated by Social Democrats [SP] and the Greens), the moderate center-right (dominated by the Liberal Free Democrats [FDP] and the Christian Democrats [CVP]), and the populist right (dominated by the Swiss People's Party [SVP]; Kriesi & Trechsel, 2008; Linder, 1998). Apart from parties, there are many interest associations, such as economic interest groups and trade unions, but also more specialized groups (e.g., professional associations) and experts (e.g., scientists and consultants) who play a role in direct democratic campaigns. Small parties often lack financial resources to campaign and need to rely on powerful interest groups for financial support, so that it is not always easy to distinguish between the impact of parties and interest groups (Kriesi, 2005). Citizens' interest groups, such as organizations representing the "new social movements," can also play a role in direct democratic campaigns. All these different kinds of actors build ad hoc coalitions ("campaign committees") for individual campaign issues. They are campaigning not only as single organizations but also as groups of actors with mutual sets of interests. Our analysis distinguishes between individuals (individual

actors) and their institutional origins, on one hand, and party origins, on the other. Individuals were coded according to their functions as, for example, parliamentarians and as party representatives. Thus, we present results on the levels of parties, organizations, and functions that individuals represented.

Sample

We analyzed the content of the main print and TV news media outlets in French- and German-speaking Switzerland throughout the campaign on naturalization, which lasted 14 weeks. Our media sample consisted of 4 elite newspapers, 11 regional newspapers, 4 tabloid newspapers, 3 free newspapers, and 2 weekly political news magazines. We also included 2 TV news programs and 3 political TV shows (in German and French) from Switzerland's public broadcasting company. Overall, we coded the news content of 24 different newspapers and 5 different TV news programs.¹

Measures

Using quantitative content analysis for data collection and data analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002), we coded all arguments in the media coverage that was presented by political actors (individual and collective actors), journalists (e.g., in editorials), or authors of letters to the editor (total $N = 3,570$ arguments). We then assigned the arguments to abstract categories and used these as substantive frames. A reliability test at the frame level yielded satisfactory results (Cohen's $\kappa = .87$). Thus, frames are sets of campaign-specific arguments. The three issue specific frames and the contest frames we identifies contained 93% (3,319) of all arguments. Of all arguments, 7% (251) did not fit into the frames.

Results

Our results are presented at the level of articles, the level of actors, and the level of frames. The latter includes the contra frame "rule of law," the pro frames "people's final say" and "mass naturalizations," and contest frames. Arguments that could not be grouped into frames ($n = 251$) are not included in the presentation of results at the frame level.

Intensity of the Campaign and Visibility in the News

The campaign gained considerable visibility in the news. The media outlets in our sample produced a total of 688 articles and news reports throughout the 14 campaign weeks. News coverage reached a peak in weeks 11, 12, and 13 (see Figure 1). In the last week before the vote, most citizens had already cast their ballots by mail. To get an idea of the intensity of the campaign in different types of media, we can simply compare the number of articles published during the campaign. As we can see in Table

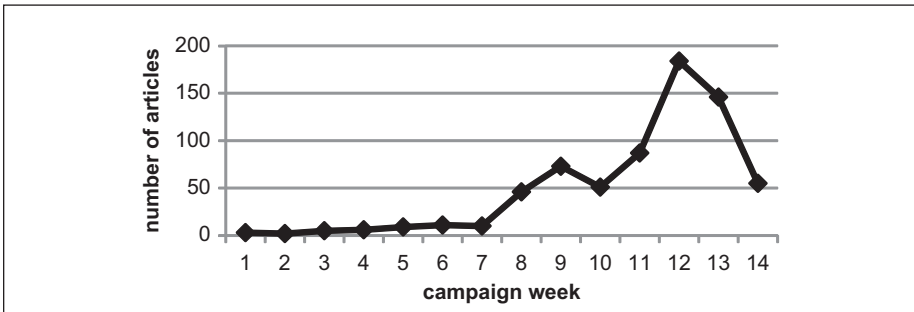


Figure 1. Quantity of articles per campaign week

Table 1. Amount of Coverage in the Media

	% of articles	Average number of articles per issue	% of frames
Elite	20.35	1.1	20.53
Regional	69.04	0.91	61.99
Tabloid	4.80	0.28	3.70
Free	3.63	0.17	2.72
Newsmagazine	0.87	0.27	0.67
TV news	0.87	0.11	1.60
TV shows	0.44	—	8.80
<i>n</i>	688	—	3,570

1, the naturalization campaign was the business of regional and elite media, whereas all other types of media together produced less than 10% of all articles and TV news reports. Our first hypothesis was confirmed.

A similar picture forms when we control for the amount of issues (i.e., the frequency of publication) by different media outlets (e.g., weekly or Sunday newspapers vs. daily newspapers). Still, the dominant media outlets are elite newspapers, with more than one article per issue, and regional newspapers, with slightly less. Last, but not least, Table 1 offers an initial overview of the amount of frames counted in the media coverage. Separate from the number of articles, we can now see the contribution of public TV news to the debate (10.4% of all frames). This result again supports our first hypothesis. The campaign issue (role of immigrants, their integration and naturalization) was rather familiar to citizens and had been emotionally debated on a number of previous occasions. The issue was controversial and, thus, potentially interesting to cover, even for the tabloid press. We need to stress, again, that most of the debate, including citizens' opinions in letters to the editor, took place in elite and regional newspapers, as well as on public TV programs.

Overall, we can say that this is a considerable amount of coverage, comparable to other direct democratic campaigns (Gerth, Dahinden, & Siegert, *in press*). Of all articles, 35.9% published were letters to the editor, 24.1% were ordinary articles, 14.7% were journalistic comments and editorials, 12.6% were short notices, and 10.5% were more elaborate types of coverage, such as interviews, portraits, and reports. The small amount of resource-intensive coverage confirms the market-influence hypothesis (H1) again. The large amount of letters to the editor indicates the controversy in the campaign and the high relevance of newspapers as a forum for political debate. In most cases, letters to the editor were biased toward the pro or contra camp. Letters to the editor are where both readers and political actors react to newspaper coverage and present their own opinions. However, it is important to note that journalists still have control. They decide whether a letter gets published. Thus, they can choose to favor one side or another of a controversy, even if they receive more letters from one camp than from the other.

Our results show that journalists sometimes take a stand and even make clear voting recommendations. Of all articles, 14.7% had aspects of commentary, and the editors presented more or less their own views and sometimes directly recommended how to vote as part of their comments. In 4 (out of 72) articles of this type, even the title led to a voting recommendation: "This newspaper recommends. . . ." But, still, most of the coverage has to be considered factual and neutral, from the perspective of journalists, which means that opinion is brought into the coverage by direct citations of political actors' arguments and not by journalists themselves. Thus, despite the decline and quasi-disappearance of the traditional party press, media-party parallelism might still exist, but only to a very small extent (Tresch, 2009; van Kempen, 2007). Taking a stand and giving voting recommendations can, however, be seen not only as a transparent and consistent form of commentary but also as a violation of the journalistic principle of political independence (Curran, 2005). From the point of view of democratic theory, it seems more important that, throughout a campaign, both the pro and contra sides have access to the media.

Figure 1 shows how the campaign intensified, based on the number of articles and TV news reports, aggregated for campaign weeks. First, the campaign—after being covered at a very low level for some weeks—actually started only 6 weeks before the day of the vote. Second, we see that the media coverage reached its climax in the 3rd and 2nd weeks before the vote. This result on the timing of news coverage of direct democratic campaigns is in line with what previous studies have revealed (e.g., de Vreese & Semetko, 2004). Finally, we see that coverage of the debate significantly dropped, to a much lower level, in the last week before the vote. By that time, most people had already cast their votes by sending in official voting ballots (in some cases, even online voting was possible). The forms and codes (in the case of online voting) were distributed 4 weeks before the day of the vote. Thus, the voting procedure is likely to have reinforced the coverage pattern as an established routine: The majority of citizens cast their ballots by mail, that is, sent in a letter with their ballot some weeks before the official voting day (June 1, 2008).

Table 2. Distribution of Frames From the Pro and Contra Sides ($N = 3,570$ arguments)

	Pro (%)	Con (%)
Political actors ($n = 2,330$)	39.96	60.04
Journalists ($n = 251$)	10.76	89.24
Letters to the editor ($n = 989$)	36.50	63.50
Total		
%	36.95	63.05
n	1,319	2,251

Framing of the Campaign in the News Media

We now move on to the distribution of the three issue-specific frames and the contest frames in different types of media outlets ($n = 3,319$). Here, again, we distinguish several types of media. Furthermore, we distinguish types of cited actors: political actors (either as part of the pro or contra camps of the campaign or as single actors), journalists who comment and bring in their own opinions, and authors of letters to the editor. In general, we have to note that the media coverage was rather constricted, as only three frames were salient. Table 2 shows a clear bias toward the contra camp. Of all frames presented in the media, 63.03% were connected to the contra camp. When we isolate the frames presented by journalists, the number rises to 89.33%. This is partly explained by the fact that only one of the four big parties was campaigning on the pro side (SVP).² The biggest total bias can be found in short notices (26.17% pro frames, 73.83% contra frames). This means that if journalists had to reduce their coverage to its essentials, they chose to do it in a biased way, favoring their own perceptions over balanced presentations of the pro and contra camp frames. The same applies for commentary coverage formats (62.92% contra frames). The bias is a little bit smaller when journalists start to invest more time and resources in coverage, as for interviews and reports (58.85% contra frames). This result supports H3.

Yet journalists still chose to include more actors from the contra camp in their coverage than actors from the pro side. If there is a bias, the bias has been actively produced by journalists. Even the findings for public TV news and shows are biased. Thus, H2 is definitely not supported. This hypothesis predicted that public media would deliver balanced and unbiased news, but this expectation was not fulfilled. Only TV shows are rather unbiased. This is not surprising at all, as an equal number of actors from both sides were invited to appear on TV, and it was the job of the presenter to give a voice to both camps. In conclusion, with the exception of TV shows and, partly, news magazines, we find a rather consistent distribution of the two camps (see Table 3). The contra side was dominant, by two thirds. Based on the theory of media bias, this is not surprising and is in line with previous results (de Vreese & Semetko, 2004; Tresch, 2009).

Table 3. Distribution of Pro and Contra Frames in Different Types of Media

	Pro (%)	Con (%)	<i>n</i> (N = 3,319)
Elite	33.58	66.42	679
Regional	36.39	63.61	2,058
Tabloid	36.59	63.41	123
Free	30.68	69.32	88
Newsmagazine	10.00	90.00	20
TV news	40.00	60.00	55
TV shows	52.03	47.97	296

The distribution of frames was also rather consistent throughout the campaign. The pro and contra frames developed in similar ways during the 14 campaign weeks. Hence, in general, when the number of pro frames increased, the number of contra arguments increased, as well, and vice versa. Thus, we can say that the campaign was presented as controversial, to a certain extent, with both the pro and contra frames being present at the same time, but journalists clearly favoring contra frames over pro frames.

Figure 2 reveals that toward the end of the campaign, the pro and contra camps got almost the same amount of coverage. At the same time, commenting by journalists and the number of letters to the editor published in newspapers increased. This is an indicator that citizens took part in the debate only toward the end of the campaign, when they filled out their ballots. In the first weeks of the campaign, coverage was closely linked to the public appearances of the pro and/or contra camps (e.g., press conferences, open debates). That is why we see big differences between the pro and contra camps in some of the early weeks of the campaign (see Figure 3).

The pattern of constriction toward the three frames is found throughout the campaign. In all the campaign weeks, the media coverage was constricted toward the three frames. Throughout the campaign, the rule of law frame was also dominant in the media coverage (39.50% of all frames; see Table 4). The rule of law frame was, in most cases, connected to the contra camp, whereas the other two substantive frames were mainly connected to actors from the pro side. However, none of the frames was exclusive to one camp. Rule of law frames were also used by the pro side. This means that the pro side repeated the main frame of the contra side to criticize it and bring it into perspective. We call this counterframing (Hänggli & Kriesi, 2012). Counterframes were used by the pro and contra sides quite often (see Table 4). As a result, pro and contra frames gained more prominence in the media than they would have by just being mentioned by their respective political camps. Political actors make strategic choices about whether to use their own arguments to positively support their positions or whether to try to explain to citizens why the arguments of their opponents are not convincing. Each choice has its own advantages and pitfalls. As noted, we also coded personal attacks and contests between the two camps that were without any issue-specific

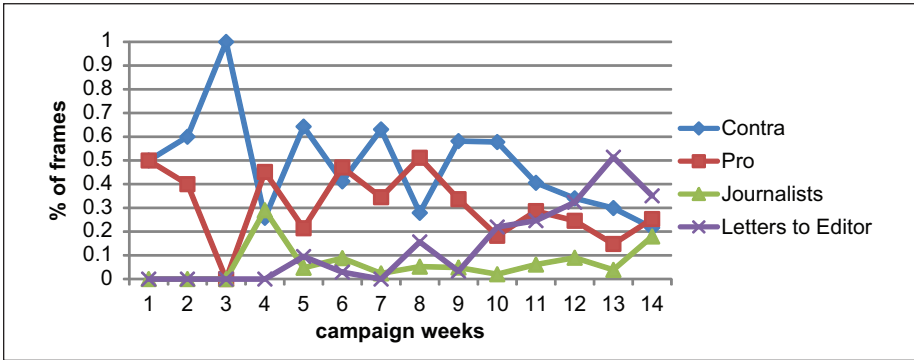


Figure 2. Presence of different kinds of sources in the 14 campaign weeks ($N = 3,319$ frames)

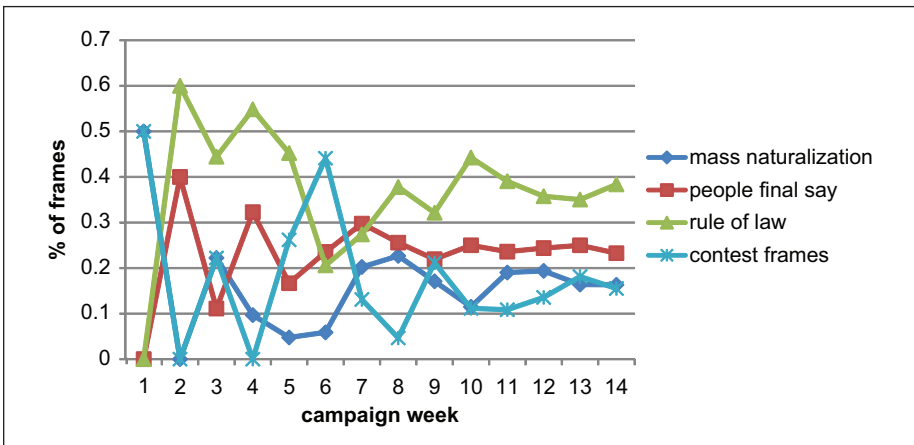


Figure 3. Frames per campaign week ($N = 3,319$ frames)

content (contest frames). In our data, contest frames were found in all types of actor categories. A total of 15.64% of all frames were identified as contest frames. Mostly, this way of framing the campaign was used by journalists, followed by political actors (on both the pro and contra sides) and authors of letters to the editor. Compared to the three substantive and issue-specific frames, issue-unspecific contest frames are of minor importance. Thus, the media presented a contest, but it was mostly a contest of arguments, personal attacks, and horse races.

Variations in how the campaign was framed by the different types of media outlets were rather weak. But, in general, again, the picture is rather consistent (see Table 5).

Table 4. Frames Connected to Different Categories of Actors

	Rule of law (%)	People's final say (%)	Mass naturalization (%)	Contest (%)
Pro camp (<i>n</i> = 931)	20.30	34.32	29.87	15.51
Contra camp (<i>n</i> = 1,399)	48.92	20.11	14.25	16.72
Journalists (<i>n</i> = 251)	44.89	15.11	18.67	21.33
Letters to the editor (<i>n</i> = 989)	43.20	29.05	14.91	12.84
Total				
%	39.50	26.00	18.86	15.64
<i>n</i>	1,311	863	626	519

Table 5. Framing in Different Types of Media

	Rule of law (%)	People's final say (%)	Mass naturalization (%)	Contest frames (%)
Elite (<i>n</i> = 679)	17.08	24.89	43.59	14.43
Regional (<i>n</i> = 2,058)	17.10	27.16	39.70	16.03
Tabloid (<i>n</i> = 123)	21.14	17.89	31.71	29.27
Free (<i>n</i> = 88)	10.23	20.45	50.00	19.32
News magazine (<i>n</i> = 20)	40.00	5.00	20.00	35.00
TV news (<i>n</i> = 55)	18.18	20.00	41.82	20.00
TV show (<i>n</i> = 296)	35.47	28.04	29.73	6.76
Total (<i>N</i> = 3,319)	18.86	26.00	39.50	15.64

The contra frame rule of law was most important, followed by the pro frames people's final say and mass naturalization. Only in the cases of news magazines and TV shows was the mass naturalization frame most important, followed by the rule of law frame and the people's final say frame. Contest frames were mainly the business of the tabloid press (and news magazines, in our case), as expected, based on the fact that personalization is the core business of tabloid journalism (Gerth et al., 2009). Coverage of the campaign was limited to the three substantive frames in all types of media; only news magazines brought some new aspects to the debate, although on a very low level. Our second hypothesis was partly supported with regard to contest frames, but results on substantive frames do not support H2. We can say that the media did not make an effort to find new and surprising general aspects of the campaign. The topic was a familiar issue to journalists, political actors, and even citizens. The campaign was covered via routine interactions between political actors and journalists. The latter were following the work, news conferences, and public appearances of the political elite (Kriesi, 2006) and mostly picked up arguments this way (Hänggli & Kriesi, 2012).

Framing of the Pro and Contra Camps

Table 6 shows the framing of political actors in their roles as representatives of political organizations. Among different kinds of political organizations, including, for example, parties, business organizations, ad hoc campaign committees, and civil society actors, parties were, by far, the dominant type of organization in the media coverage. This confirms Höglinger's (2008) earlier finding that political parties are reinforced during direct-democratic campaigns. Table 6 further reveals the dominance of the populist right party (SVP) in the pro camp and the frames people final's say (64.57% of all SVP frames) and mass naturalization (74.94%). The rest of these two frames was shared by the other big parties. All used the contra frames as counterframes to strengthen their own positions, which were focused on the rule of law frame. Surprisingly, the rule of law frame was used very often by the SVP (46.47%), compared to the other four big parties (together, 41.23%). This means that the SVP was, by far, the dominant campaigning party, not only focusing on its own arguments but also using the arguments of its opponents as counterframes. The framing of the campaign from the perspective of the contra camp was prominent, but it was not reserved to the contra camp actors. This can partly be explained by the fact that the SVP was isolated as the only big party in the pro camp and, thus, received more attention, as a single party, than other parties did.

Table 6 further reveals that the total number of frames used by the SVP was distributed more or less equally among the three frames, whereas this was not the case for the other parties. Here, especially, the mass naturalization frame plays only a marginal role.

We then regrouped the actors by institutional origin (Table 7). For example, all members of the government were regrouped under Federal Council, and all members of the First Chamber of the Swiss Federal Parliament were regrouped under National Council, irrespective of party membership. The institution whose members are most frequently cited is the National Council. The Federal Council comes in a close second. All other institutions, including the Second Chamber of the Federal Parliament—the Council of States—are less prominently represented in the campaign. However, we have to note that 38% (1,270) of all frames were not connected to the institutional origins of actors, that is, these institutions were not explicitly mentioned in the media. Thus, the total *N* here is 2,049 frames. This result further supports the assumption of de Vreese and Semetko (2004) that lower prominence of key representatives of the political elite goes hand in hand with lower visibility of those representatives' campaigns in the media—and confirms H4. Civil society actors, in particular, did not get the same amount of attention from the media as did members of the key political institutions. Last, but not least, on the individual level, the most prominent actor was the member of the national government who was in charge of the campaign issue: Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf (Minister of Justice 2008–2010). Thus, even though government representatives are not expected to “campaign,” they are literally the most visible actors in direct democratic campaigns. They interpret their mandate to “inform”

Table 6. Frame Distribution and the Five Biggest Parties (N = 1,678 frames)

	SVP (n = 976)		FDP (n = 225)		SP (n = 158)		CVP (n = 129)		GPS (n = 67)		Other parties (n = 123)	
	% of frames	% of parties	% of frames	% of parties	% of frames	% of parties	% of frames	% of parties	% of frames	% of parties	% of frames	% of parties
Rule of law (n = 553)	46.47	26.33	12.48	30.67	13.38	46.84	9.40	40.31	5.97	49.25	12.30	55.28
People's final say (n = 477)	64.57	31.56	13.42	28.44	6.29	18.99	6.71	24.81	3.14	22.39	5.87	22.76
Mass naturalization (n = 386)	76.94	30.43	5.44	9.33	6.74	16.45	4.66	13.95	3.11	17.91	3.11	9.76
Contest frames (n = 262)	43.51	11.68	27.10	31.56	10.69	17.72	10.31	20.93	2.67	10.45	5.73	12.20

Table 7. Frame Distribution and Institutional Origin of Actors (*N* = 2,049 frames)

	National council (n = 483)			Federal council (n = 310)			Cantonal and communal parliaments (n = 72)			Federal court of justice (n = 75)			Federal department of justice and police (n = 69)			Council of states (n = 53)			City parliaments (n = 43)			Others (n = 944)		
	% within frames	% within institutions	% within frames	% within institutions	% within frames	% within institutions	% within frames	% within institutions	% within frames	% within institutions	% within frames	% within institutions	% within frames	% within institutions	% within frames	% within institutions	% within frames	% within institutions	% within frames	% within institutions	% within frames	% within institutions		
Rule of law (n = 845)	19.76	34.58	17.04	46.45	4.02	47.22	5.33	60.00	2.72	33.33	3.79	60.38	2.72	52.49	44.62	39.94								
People's final say (n = 519)	29.29	31.47	10.79	18.06	4.24	30.56	4.43	30.67	2.70	20.29	1.73	16.98	1.93	23.26	44.89	24.68								
Mass naturalization (n = 378)	27.25	31.33	18.25	22.26	2.91	15.28	0.79	4.00	6.35	34.78	1.06	7.55	2.12	18.60	41.27	16.53								
Contest frames (n = 307)	19.87	12.63	13.36	13.23	1.63	6.94	1.30	5.33	2.61	11.59	2.61	15.09	0.65	4.65	57.98	18.86								

citizens in a very broad sense. This result confirms earlier findings (Gerth et al., in press).

Conclusion

The results presented here show that the media depicted the campaign in a rather biased fashion (toward the contra side), even though the most active political actor (SVP) was campaigning on the pro side. The media presented the campaign as constricted (toward three substantive frames), as controversial, and as a contest of arguments rather than a contest of personalities. Some variation, however, was found with regard to different types of media outlets and different types of actors involved in the campaign. We can say that the campaign was visible, especially during its last weeks. Furthermore, the campaign was most visible in the elite and regional media. Hence, our first hypothesis was confirmed by our data. We found consistent results on the timing of the coverage of the campaign. This means that the media followed routine procedures in their coverage and that the logic of voting procedures—votes were predominantly submitted by mail—had a decisive influence on the timing of campaign coverage. We found three dominant substantive frames in the coverage, two from the pro side and one from the contra side. All different kinds of media constricted their coverage toward these three frames.

In addition, we found issue-unspecific contest frames that were of minor importance. The sources of the framing were, obviously, journalists themselves, political actors, and authors of letters to the editor. But even if a large number of frames were not presented as framing by journalists, but by political actors and authors of letters to the editor, journalists still had influence, insofar as they selected the actors they cited and letters they published. Of the seven different types of media outlets, only news magazines offered frames that differed from the three dominant substantive frames. All types of outlets, with the exception of news magazines, again, presented the same frame (rule of law) as dominant. Contest frames were especially prominent in tabloid newspapers. The framing bias toward one frame and, thus, toward the contra camp was surprisingly striking, especially in regard to coverage with low resource intensity. We can say that efforts by journalists to develop their own lines of argument were almost inexistent. Thus, H3 was confirmed by our data, but H2 was not confirmed. The media relied on the frames offered by political actors. Journalists contributed to making some frames more prominent than others. This leads to a striking bias in the visibility of the contra and pro arguments. Media coverage of direct democratic campaigns tended to be biased toward one camp, even in the public service media that were most expected to implement balanced and neutral coverage. H2 was not confirmed by our data (with the exception of contest frames). Our study further confirms the institutional bias that has been found by others. Government and parliamentary representatives are most visible, whereas civil society actors do play a minor role, and there are no differences between the pro and contra camps. The campaign was dominated by the big parties. They used framing but also counterframing as important strategies to increase their visibility in the media. H4 was confirmed by our data.

News media coverage of direct democratic campaigns is a routine business when direct democratic votes are routine for political actors as well. The media offer a considerable amount of coverage that allows citizens to participate in the arguments of different kinds of political actors. The media also offer a platform for debate and do comment on arguments. However, our study leads to the assumption that the media mostly report what is happening in the political arena. They not only choose prominent actors as sources; they also largely accept how political actors frame campaigns. They do not offer new ways of framing campaign issues but choose to weight existing frames differently.

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Notes

1. The sample consisted of the following news outlets: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ; elite, German), *NZZ am Sonntag* (elite, German), *Sonntagszeitung* (elite, German), *Le temps* (elite, French), *Aargauer Zeitung* (regional, German), *Basler Zeitung* (regional, German), *Berner Zeitung* (regional, German), *Die Südostschweiz* (regional, German), *Die Südostschweiz am Sonntag* (regional, German), *Neue Luzerner Zeitung* (regional, German), *Sonntag AZ* (regional, German), *St. Galler Tagblatt* (regional, German), *Tages Anzeiger* (regional, German), *24 heures* (regional, French), *Tribune de Genève* (regional, French), *Blick* (tabloid, German), *Sonntagsblick* (tabloid, German), *Le Matin* (tabloid, French), *Le Matin Dimanche* (tabloid, French), *20 Minuten* (free, German), *20 Minutes* (free, French), *Le Matin Bleu* (free, French), *Weltwoche* (magazine, German), *L'Hebdo* (magazine, French), *Tagesschau* (TV news, German), *Le Journal* (TV news, French), *Arena* (TV show, German), *Rundschau* (TV show, German), and *Infrarouge* (TV show, French).
2. The four big parties are the Social Democrats (SP), the Liberal Free Democrats (FDP), the Christian Democrats (CVP), and the populist-right Swiss People's Party (SVP; Linder, 1998).

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